Gilbert Mays

Local man has honey of a hobby

By FRANCES H. PAULETTE

If you were to stop by the home of Gilbert Mays, just off of highway 460, after he's finished his job at Transco, you most likely wouldn't find him at home.

Inquiring of his wife, Irene, as to his whereabouts, you might get an answer something like this, "He's busy with his honey!"

Oh yes, Gilbert Mays loves his honey.....and the approximately 175 hives of bees that produce that honey.

Mays has a fascinating avocation, beekeeping. He's been at it for approximately fifty years. His late grandmother Mollie Mays, who incidentally lived to be 102, raised bees in a nail keg. Whenever the bees swarmed and she had to get them in a hive, she would call her grandson, Gilbert and he would come and help her. From the early age of six or seven he became more and more interested in the art of beekeeping.

Beekeeping is just what the name suggests; the man merely keeps the busy little bees...Although they may live in his hive, he, in no way owns them. In a most independent manner they go about their business pollinating the flowers and giving honey for man to enjoy.

If the bees wanted, they could easily swarm away from a particular hive and relocate somewhere else, but not only are they industrious, they are smart. If the beekeeper is doing his job properly they know their surroundings are good and they will stay there.

Man, in a sense, may manipulate the bees, but he is not able to improve on their work or further glorify the results of their efforts. Bees are efficient, loyal, handworking and even rather intelligent, despite their tiny size. Contrary to popular belief, they are quite docile.

Beekeeping and honey production go hand in hand with the miraculous cycle of nature.

No day for beekeeper Gilbert Mays is ever quite the same. His avocation holds a fascination as no other hobby could do. He is constantly rewarded by his efforts.

The modern beehive is a series of boxes stacked atop one another; inside each of these boxes hang frames in which the bees build their hexagonal-celled combs. The bottom sets of boxes are actually working and living areas for the colony of bees; all the boxes stacked above (called supers) are placed there by the beekeeper for the bees to fill with honey. Three types of bees live in the colony: the queen bee, the drones, and the worker bees.

The queen bee, which lives for two or three years, exists primarily to lay eggs. She mates only once, and is then capable of laying 1500 or more eggs every day until her death. She is the center of attention for the hive; when she is nearby, all the other bees exhibit a particularly excited behavior. They feed her, raise her young, and protect her. When she dies, without warning, the rest of the colony actually makes an audible wailing sound that they make at no other time. Yet, if the other bees sense that their queen's usefulness is waning, they will begin to raise another queen. Then when her egg laying abilities are finally gone, they kill her.

When necessary, (usually at the beginning of spring) the queen bee lays unfertilized eggs, which produces drones. Their only purpose in life is to mate with a new queen. Afterwards they are tolerated only as long as food supplies are ample and conditions in the hive are favorable. But, because drones have no stinger and are unable to gather pollen or nectar they are useless. So, when food gets low, or the other bees get boo busy to care for them, the drones are pushed out of the hive to die.

Because of the great number of tasks they perform the worker bees are probably the most fascinating members of the honeybee colony. Not more than one day after the new worker bee emerges from her brood cell, she begins her life of unending toil. If born in the spring, right before the peak of the nectar flow, a worker bee might live as long as five weeks. If born in October, right before the inactivity of winter, she can live through the spring.

One of the first duties of a worker bee is to clean the brood cells in preparation for the queen's egg-laying process. She cleans the cells with a thorough licking. Then, when the worker bee is about three days old, the head glands are mature enough to secrete "royal jelly" which she begins feeding the larvae growing in the brood cells. If, for some reason, food supplies are low, she will draw on her own body reserve to insure the lives of unborn bees. It takes nearly 3000 workers over 10 hours of nursing and feeding for a single larvae to emerge as a healthy contributor to hive life.

When the worker bee is about two weeks old, her nursing job ends and she becomes a "house bee", which means she is responsible for the inside of the hive. She begins to produce wax for building and repairing the comb. She meets older field bees at the opening of the hive to help unload nectar, pollen water and propolis (a sticky plant substance used in hive building).

When needed, she cleans house, removes dead bees, dead marauder insects and feces. She acts as a protection from invasion.

The bee hive will melt at 115 degrees F. and if the hive gets too hot, a large number of tiny workers will stand at the entrance fanning their wings approximately 400 times per second to cool the hive. Their very own air-conditioning system!

Should this effort fail to cool down the hive, the worker bees will drop whatever they are doing, fly out, bring back water in their honey stomachs and bathe the entire hive in water.

When the worker bee completes her days of housekeeping, she becomes a "field bee". Most likely the worker bee has already taken a test flight or two, but on foraging trips may fly as far as two or three miles away, even through wind and rain. She must be able to fly straight to the hive, (home) loaded with pollen and nectar without becoming lost.

By doing a certain kind of dance on the comb after one of these trips, the worker bee tells the others in which direction to fly, how far to fly and what to expect when she gets there.

There is one thing that Gilbert Mays, nor any other beekeeper or scientist has ever discovered and this is, how the worker bees know what to do and when to do it. No worker bee stays with a certain job for any given length of time, but she does what the situation demands.

When the worker bees' wings began to wear out, every trip made to the field becomes harder and harder. Finally the worker will crawl away and die.

It seems that the bee seems to know when her usefulness is over and chooses to use the last bit of energy to go away from the hive and die rather than make more work for the others who would have to push her out.

Honey not only delights man but mystifies him because he

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GILBERT MAYS, LOCAL BEEKEEPER, waits patiently at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Vernell Mitchell for swarm of bees to enter the hive. For some reason or other, the bees did not want to enter the hive. They would start into the hive and then come out again; after doing this for several times, they seemed to decide they did not want to be captured and flew away . . . for approximately one-half mile. The bees then promptly turned, flew back and quickly entered the waiting hive. An incident such as this is quite uncommon according to Mrs. Irene Mays. (Picture by Michael K. Brandt of Spout Spring, student at CVCC studying photography and an amateur beekeeper.

Our Congratulations And Best Wishes

To
The Appomattox County Homemakers

From

Virginia Fibre Corporation
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Blanch that food!

By SHIRLEY W. WALTON
Extension Agent

Blanching Food Very Important

In order to have good quality vegetables out of the freezer during the winter or coming months, you MUST blanch these and freeze them properly. Vegetables should be blanched in accordance with the time stated in reliable tables and cooled immediately. Enzyme action is retarded by freezing, but not sufficiently to prevent off flavors and poor color after storage if blanching is not done.

Many of you have been harvesting green peas from the garden and have been calling about blanching times. We have information in this Extension Office on a bulletin rack (free to anyone) on how to can, freeze, pickle, preserve, etc. most any food that you would have in your gardens.

Freezing does not destroy any of the micro-organisms which cause changes in food quality and food safety. Activity of bacteria, yeast and mold is slowed to a stand-still while the food is frozen. Enzymes do continue to affect flavor, texture and color of food in the frozen state, but the action is very slow. An example of this would be apples that you would put in cold storage. We know how crisp these apples are when they come off the tree and are sent to storage, but as they stay in this cold storage for a long period of time, we know that they continue to ripen and mellow. Our food, likewise, continues to ripen and can even lose much of its nutritive value, if not handled properly before entering the freezer.

Heating foods before freezing will destroy the enzymes. That's why blanching of vegetables is recommended. Heating does reduce the number of bacteria, yeast and molds present, but its principle purpose is to destroy the enzymes. Remember, the enzymes are those qualities in a fruit or vegetable that causes it to ripen. Heating also makes vegetables easier to pack into containers.

To blanch, lower a small amount of vegetable into boiling water. The ratio of

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Compare generic prices

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changing so consumers need to keep up on comparisons too."

Keeping up isn't easy, said the faculty member in Tech's College of Home Economics. One factor which complicates comparison shopping is that generic products often are separated from the store and national brands.

The sources of the savings on generic products are primarily the product quality, said Miss Barton. The standard minimum specification for generic food items is USDA Grade C. National brands and top line store brands primarily use Grade A and some Grade B.

"All three grades are safe, wholesome and nutritious and are packed under the same sanitary standards," said the specialist.

The other sources of savings are the reduced advertising and promotion costs and less expensive packaging and labeling.

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